

STATEMENT AT HEARING OF HOUSE INTERNATIONAL SUB-COMMITTEE
ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

House Rayburn Building, Room 2172, at 10.30 a.m.

Prepared statement by David Aikman, Professor of History, Patrick Henry
College

Mr. Chairman, members of the sub-committee, Members of the House, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by congratulating Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom John Hanford, his staff in the Department of State, and foreign service officers in many different nations and cities for an excellent document, the International Religious Freedom Report of 2005.

I have been asked to comment on the section of the report dealing with China, and in particular with the situation of Christians in China. I will, of course, make reference to the Chinese government's treatment of other religions, but my focus will be on the situation with regard to religious freedom of Protestant and Catholic Christians. As the report makes clear, China unfortunately has given no reason since the last report not to continue to be included in the category of intense repression of religious freedom that the Secretary of State has categorized "of particular concern." In Tibet Buddhism, in Xinjiang Islam, and throughout China both Protestant and Catholic Christianity during late 2004 and early 2005 were the target of deliberate attempts by central government and local officials to suppress the freedom and autonomy of people of faith. I would like to draw particular attention to continuing efforts to break up and intimidate leadership of Protestant House church communities and to hamper severely the activities of Chinese Catholics who are not affiliated with the Catholic Patriotic Association.

In December 2004 the arrest and detention of Henan province Protestant leader Zhang Rongliang was an egregious example of entirely unjustified persecution of a prominent Chinese Protestant leader. I first met Mr. Zhang seven years ago, and he made it clear he had no political argument with the Chinese government. In August of 1998 he and several other Chinese Protestant house church leaders agreed on a document, "The United Appeal of Various Branches of China's House Church," which appealed to both the government and to government-approved organizations responsible for Protestant Christian activity in China to allow China's unregistered Christian communities not to be persecuted merely because they did not want to be registered with the authorities. In the fall of that year, he signed another document, "A Confession of Faith," which was a carefully thought-through statement of evangelical Protestant belief, regarded by theologians in this country and elsewhere as entirely orthodox from the perspective of evangelical Protestant theology. Nevertheless, when a senior Chinese official responsible for administration of China's faith community came through the United

States in 2004, he gave as his reason for the Chinese government's failure to respond to "The United Appeal" the entirely specious reply that the signatories of the document had been members of cults. In November, 2004, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, after reviewing the case of Mr. Zhang Rongliang, found that his detention was indeed arbitrary.

Two months ago, another prominent Chinese Protestant Christian was released after two years imprisonment in a reform through labor camp. As is well known, sentences of up to three years can be given in such camps by the Chinese authorities without the inconvenient formality of a trial. The individual was Mr. Zhang Yinan, an intellectual from Henan Province who had studied closely the development of Christianity in China, particularly in the past four decades. Mr. Chairman, may I notify you of the heinous offense for which Mr. Zhang was confined for two years in a labor camp? He had written in a private prayer journal that he was praying that some day China would have a Christian constitution and Christian leaders. Note that the prayer journal had not in any way been made public at the time it was seized in a search of Mr. Zhang's home. A Chinese friend of Mr. Zhang who phoned the public security bureau investigator in charge of the case asked why Mr. Zhang was being held. "Zhang Yinan does not have a criminal problem," the investigator replied, "he has a mind problem." If a local Chinese investigator is free to label as a "mind problem" the comments of a private man of Christian faith in the center of China, it is very easy to see why China should continue to be regarded as "a country of particular concern" in the State Department annual report on International Religious Freedom.

In March 2005, new regulations on religious affairs came into effect in China, having been signed by Premier Wen Jiabao at the end of November 2004. The Vice President of the China Islamic Association, and organization approved by the authorities, said that the regulations were "designed to protect Chinese citizens' religious freedoms, a basic human right." But singled out in the new regulations for special prohibition were the publishing and distribution of religious texts, including simply the printing of Bibles. Just eight days ago, a prominent Beijing Christian pastor, Cai Zhaohua, was sentenced to three years imprisonment for allegedly illegal business activities. When police searched his warehouse they found, among other things, 200,000 Bibles. Now the interesting thing is that the Bible is not illegal in China. China provides a hospitable environment for enterprising publishers of all kinds of things, including just-released pirated DVD's of American movies, which you can buy without fear of action by the authorities on Beijing's main street from East to West into Tiananmen Square, Yet it is somehow illegal for a Chinese businessman to print a Bible, a book that is legally permitted in China and for which there is no copyright at all. By the way, Mr. Cai liked just to give away his Bibles.

Mr. Cai's real challenge to the government, however, was that he was the pastor of an unregistered house church group of Protestant Christians. As is

well known both inside and outside China, many of China's Protestants don't want to register with the government because they know that it is probable that they will be forced to submit to the Three Self Patriotic Movement, the organization under the supervision of the State Administration for Religious Affairs that is authorized to oversee all permitted Protestant Christian activities in China. Why don't China's house churches want to submit to the theology of the TSPM? One reason is that the TSPM is dominated by the theology of a 90-year-old Chinese bishop, K.Ting, or Ding Guangxun, who does not believe in justification by faith, a key Protestant theological point, or the inerrancy of the Bible, a doctrine shared by Protestant evangelicals all over the world, or even the theological difference between Christian faith and unbelief. Bishop Ding has been forcing down the throats even of TSPM official pastors a theology the vast majority of them deeply resent, the so-called Theological Reconstruction. This is an attempt to interpret as Christian the doctrines of socialism, or more precisely, the Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought version of socialism. Since China's own political leadership seems to have wandered far from such doctrines in its directing of the national economy, there is a certain irony in a nonagenarian Chinese bishop trying to force China's entire community of Protestant pastors to espouse it.

Age, however, proves to be no protection for Chinese Catholic bishops who run afoul of the Chinese authorities. Catholic Bishop Gao Kexian died in August 2004 at the age of 76 in an unknown prison in north China. According to an American Catholic writer who is informed on this subject, there are at least 18 bishops of China's unrecognized Catholic church, loyal to Rome and not recognized by the state, who in some form of detention today. Four Chinese bishops from the official recognized Chinese Catholic church, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, were even denied permission to attend a worldwide synod of Catholic bishops in Rome last month. In Hebei Province, center of the most concentrated community of Catholics in China, police activity aimed at suppressing China's unrecognized Catholic priesthood and laity is a fairly constant reality of Catholic life.

Mr. Chairman, these examples I have cited of egregious Chinese government suppression of religious freedom confirm why the Secretary of State has been correct in pronouncing China, with regard to religious freedom, "a country of particular concern." Now, Mr. Chairman, most Americans harbor no ill-will towards China, and indeed wish the country the greatest possible success in raising the living standards of its people. But most Americans also hope that the Chinese government will recognize that religious freedom is not just a right to be grudgingly granted a people by its rulers, but, when embraced, a blessing for every nation that chooses to practice it. As I said, Mr. Chairman, most Americans wish the very best for the Chinese people. But most Americans would also agree that of all the good things Americans desire the Chinese to enjoy as soon as possible, freedom of conscience and faith are

among the first. Without that, few of the other blessings of prosperity are worth very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman